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Children's safety and security in non formal pre-primary schools: The intervention measures

Catherine Gakii Murungi, Begi Nyakwara, Teresa Mwoma
Early Childhood and Special Needs Department, Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to come up with intervention measures that could be put in place to mitigate the challenges experienced in non-formal schools to enhance safety and security of children. Purposive sampling was used to select Nairobi City County and all the pre-primary schools attached to non-formal schools in informal settlements in the county and the head teachers/managers and teachers working in these pre-primary schools. A sample size of 54 pre-primary schools was selected. A total number of 136 participants from the sampled pre-primary schools participated in the study comprising of 78 preschool teachers, 54 head teachers, and four education officers. The findings revealed various intervention measures by participants such as intervention by: county government, school management such as picking and dropping children, fencing school and having lockable gates.

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Corresponding Author:

Catherine Gakii Murungi
Early Childhood and Special Needs Department
Kenyatta University
P.o Box 43844-00100, Nairobi, Kenya
Email: gakii.catherine@ku.ac.ke

1. INTRODUCTION

The early years of a child' development provides a window of opportunity to lay a strong foundation for a child's life. During this period children make leaps in physical, motor, social-emotional, cognitive and language development [1]. Neuroscience demonstrates the critical impact of early experiences in brain development. Providing proper health, nutrition and early stimulation in the early years also facilitate brain development and children's well-being. The benefits of early childhood care and education programmes therefore contribute to good child development outcomes, setting the foundation for lifelong learning and helps in monitoring the health and nutritional status of children in the early years of development [2], [3]. Exposure of children to negative conditions and experiences during early years negatively impact all aspects of children's lives consequently affecting the social and economic development and human capital formation of a nation [4].

School based health and nutrition programmes have been identified as strategies of reducing safety related problems likely to affect children's learning. Children do not have to leave the school compound for lunch but the school can serve those meals [5]. Hence, introducing safety and security measures in the school set up.

Safe and secure learning environment is largely conceptualized as protection of children from physical harm, perceived as an adult responsibility to provide a safe physical environment for children's learning [6]. Schools should be a place where children are protected from any form of danger, diseases, physical harm or injury. The school environment should have sufficient water and sanitary facilities with well-fixed structures to avoid any damage to the health and development of children caused by exposure to

hazards such as infectious diseases as a result of unsafe water supply, lack of hand washing facilities or unsanitary latrines [5].

In ensuring that the health and safety of children are taken care of; a common framework for school health was agreed upon by the international agencies that participated in the World Education Forum held in Dakar, 2000 [5]. The health framework aimed at implementing health programs to enhance enrolment and retention of children in schools, learn, and develop knowledge and healthy behaviours that protect them from diseases [7], [8]. Kenya in recognizing the important role of good health in schools has made significant progress towards improving the health and education standards of school children by launching the National School Health Policy and Guidelines [9]. Article 53 of the constitution of Kenya also provides that every child has the right to basic nutrition, healthcare, protection and basic education [10]. Every child has got a right to protection

The conducive school environment plays a key role of promoting children's environmental health and safety. The National School Health Strategic Implementation Plan 2010-2015 focuses on key thematic areas of improving school safety and education. Among them are child rights, child protection and responsibilities, values and life skills, gender issues, special needs, disability and rehabilitation, water, sanitation and hygiene, nutrition, disease prevention, and control, school infrastructure and environmental safety [9]. While all the thematic areas are critical in the welfare and health of children, the current study was delimited to protection and environmental safety.

According to the alternative provision of basic education and training policy of 2009, non-formal schools in Kenya have been defined as institutions that resemble formal schools transmitting a formalized curriculum leading to formal examinations. However these schools differ in school practices, management, financing, staffing conditions, registration, operating environment and school structures [11]. These institutions were established as an effort of trying to address issues of access, equity, quality and relevance of education.

To support the provision of basic education for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, the Ministry of Education Science and Technology in 2015 came up with standard guidelines for schools offering alternative basic education. Recognizing the challenges experienced by the schools in relation to play grounds and other learning facilities, non-formal schools are required to make arrangements with neighbouring institutions to use their facilities [12]. Article 39 © of the Basic Education Act 2013 requires the Cabinet Secretary to ensure that children from marginalized backgrounds are not prevented from pursuing and completing their basic education. The Basic Education Act through article 95 (3) (i) and (j) further requires the Cabinet Secretary in consultation with the National Education Board to prescribe regulations on how schools shall be classified with regard to their background and make exemptions to schools supporting children from poor backgrounds [13], [14].

Over the years, commissions of education have been established to review educational provisions propelling national government to come up with interventions such as free and compulsory basic education as a strategy of ensuring lifelong learning. Through the commissions, the spirit of public and private partnerships in education was embraced by the government as a strategy of encouraging increased individual and community participation in the education sector. Despite all these efforts, a number of children in urban informal settlement and rural poor remain underserved by the education system. Among the factors identified to contribute to this kind of scenario especially in urban informal settlement include; increasing household poverty and the HIV and AIDS pandemic [15].

The non-formal pre-primary schools were established to provide education and other services to children such as shelter, health, nutrition and protection. These centres also target children of primary school age using the formal curriculum and operating with the support of non-governmental organizations such as Community Based and Faith Based Organizations as well as private individuals [16]. It is in view of the changes outlined that this study was designed to establish the safety and security measures put in place to ensure that children in pre-primary schools attached to non-formal schools in informal settlements in Nairobi are safe and secure while in school.

Provision of early childhood education has been a shared responsibility between the government, parents, communities and non-state actors. The non-state actors include private schools, complementary/non-formal schools and Faith Based Organisations [17]. With the promulgation of the constitution of Kenya in 2010 however, the responsibility of providing preschool education was moved to counties with the national government retaining the roles of policy formulation, curriculum development and teacher training [10]. In order to produce globally competitive citizens as envisioned in Vision 2030 the health and safety of children while in school is key in providing a proper foundation in children's health and education [18].

The pre-schools attached to non-formal schools which are the focus of this study refer to education centres that do not meet the requirement for registration as public or private schools. They offer alternatives for children who cannot access public pre-primary schools [12]. The Nairobi City County Task Force report

of 2014 revealed that 61440 children were enrolled in non-formal pre-primary schools found in informal settlements of Korogocho, *et al*. [17]. The report further reveals that the non-formal pre-primary schools compliment the effort of the county government in the provision of early childhood education. The report continues to disclose that in 2013 there were 300 non-formal pre-primary schools in informal settlements due to few public schools in the informal settlements. In addition the report shows that providers of complementary education have established coordination mechanisms to enhance professionalism in the sub-sector. However, the report does not highlight on the safety and security measures put in place in these centres to enhance children's health and well-being while in school. The current study therefore sought to find answers to the following questions: What intervention measures should be put in place to enhance children's safety and security in non-formal pre-schools?

The study was to achieve the following objective: to suggest intervention measures to be put in place in pre-primary schools attached to non-formal to enhance children's health and wellbeing. A title of article should be the fewest possible words that accurately describe the content of the paper.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a mixed method approach whereby qualitative and quantitative data collection procedure were applied. This allowed triangulation of data captured from different participants [19], [20]. Questionnaires, interview guides, and observation schedules were used to collect data. The questionnaire was directly administered to preschool teachers in the selected schools. Head teachers and education officers in Nairobi City County were also interviewed. Observation schedule was used to determine the safety and security intervention measures that were put in place in the sampled pre-primary schools.

2.1. Study locale

The study was done in pre-primary schools attached to non-formal schools, that is in the informal settlements of Nairobi City County, Kenya. The reason behind selecting Nairobi county is because it houses many informal settlements including; Kibera, Mathari, Mukuru, Dagoreti, and Kawangware.

2.2. Sampling and sample size

Purposive sampling was used to select Nairobi City County and all the pre-primary schools attached to non-formal schools in the mentioned informal settlements in the county and the head teachers and teachers working in these pre-primary schools. A sample size of 62 pre-primary schools was selected from a total population of 204 pre-schools attached to non-formal schools in the county. This was done using systematic random sampling which constituted 30% of the total number of pre-primary schools. In the main study, the actual number that participated in the study was 54 pre-primary schools. This is because some of the centres sampled had closed down. A total number of 136 participants from the sampled pre-primary schools participated in the study comprising of 78 preschool teachers, 54 head teachers and four education officers.

2.3. Induction of research team, piloting of research tools and ethical clearance

2.3.1. Induction of research team

The research team comprised of a one principle investigator and two co-principal investigators, included in the team were; seven research assistants. A one-day induction workshop was organized to introduce the research team members to the purpose of the research and tools that to be utilised in data collection. Issues on safety and security intervention measures concerning children in pre-primary schools in informal settlements were discussed. This was done to sensitize the research team on the research context. The overall process and tools to be used were also discussed.

2.3.2. Piloting of the research tools

Prior to data collection, the research tools were pre-tested in two pre-primary schools. The pre-testing was done at Kasarani sub-county to determine their effectiveness and eliminate any errors that would affect data collection. After pilot testing of the instruments, debriefing and feedback sessions were held to analyse the responses obtained from respondents and field observations. Results were then used to improve and modify the tools in readiness for actual data collection.

2.3.3. Ethical clearance

The research team sought permission from Kenyatta University Research Ethics Board. As well as from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation as required in the country. Permission was also sought from Nairobi City County to carry out research in the informal schools. Additional consent was also sought from the management of the sampled pre-primary schools and from other

participants who participated in the study. For confidentiality purposes, codes were used for the sampled schools and also to represent the participants so as to conceal their identity. Verbatim information from each participant was given identifiers indicating who said what and from different schools without using actual names of who said what.

2.4. Data collection and analysis

2.4.1. Key informant interviews

Key informant interviews for preschool head teachers/managers, County and Sub-County education officers in charge of early childhood were utilized to gather information on the safety and security measures put in place in pre-primary schools and the challenges experienced. They were also used to capture information on possible interventions to be put in place in the centers to enhance children's safety and security while in pre-school.

2.4.2. Observation check list

Observation check list was utilized to capture information on the status of infrastructure, environmental safety, water, sanitation and hygiene and feeding programs in the pre-primary schools.

2.4.3. Questionnaire

Questionnaire was utilized to obtain information from teachers on the safety and security measures put in place in the pre-primary schools to enhance health and wellbeing of children. It was also used to capture information on the challenges encountered from teachers' point of view and the possible interventions that could be put in place to mitigate the challenges.

2.4.4. Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics was utilized to analyzed quantitative data presented in frequencies and percentages. Field notes from qualitative data was transcribed and made available in word. Verbatim information from different participants were categorized into themes to generate meanings. Analysis and presentation of qualitative data was done alongside that of quantitative data to triangulate responses from different participants and results presented using tables and text.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study sought to come up with intervention measures that could be put in place to mitigate the challenges experienced in non-formal schools to enhance safety and security of children. Various intervention measures were suggested by participants focusing on the themes under study as illustrated in the following subsections.

3.1. Interventions by county government

The county government has a big role to play in promoting safety and security of children in pre-primary schools as this is a devolved function. However, the participants felt that county government has not fully executed its mandate when it comes to promoting safety and security in non-formal pre-schools. Hence, participants suggested that:

> "*County government should do regular checkups to ensure that minimum standards on safety and security of children in pre-primary schools in informal settlements are upheld and observed*." (HT Grapeyard)

This agrees with the findings by Glariana, Nick, and Solar [21].

3.2. Interventions by school managements

Intervention by school management focuses on fencing and physical facilities, dropping and picking of children as well as feeding program.

3.3. Dropping and picking of children

In relation to dropping and picking of children, participants suggested that parents and guardians should be responsible in ensuring that their children are dropped and picked from school. They suggested this by saying:

> *"Parents should take their children personally to school because anything can happen on the way as the child is going to school. And also coming for their own children, and not sending somebody. We have heard of cases where some children get lost on the way."* (SCEO)
> *"The parents to make time for picking their children every day after school because most of our children come from slums.*" (Tr. Bella)

This agrees with sentiments expressed in a study by Chemeli, Mwongeli, and Barmao [22], as well as those of Musu-Gillette, *et al*. [23].

3.4. Fencing school compounds and having lockable gates

Participants identified fencing the school compound as critical in enhancing children's safety and security while in school as well as having security officers to man the school gate. Teachers had this to say:

> *"There is need to fence the school compound and make a lockable gate to avoid children from going out unknowingly."* (Tr. Savyo)
> "*Schools should have a proper fence to avoid interference from outsiders. Security should be beefed up by hiring a security officer to ensure children's safety to and from school."* (Tr. Gifted)

These findings agree with those of a study done in secondary schools in Nairobi and Nyeri counties by Wanderi [24], it was found out that schools had improper gates and even the schools that had gates did not have a fence or the fence was not complete. This is also supported by Díaz-Vicario and Gairín Sallán [25] who argues that, a school environment that has a lockable gate and a strong fence gives the learners a feeling of safety in an environment that is conducive for learning.

Participants further suggested that all schools should have functional firefighting equipment and first aid kits to be used in case of fire outbreak as well as when children are injured. Teachers should also be trained on how to use the equipment as well as providing first aid services. In supporting this strategy, participants had this to say:

> *"The solution is to buy firefighting equipment to ensure safety of the children in case of fire outbreak."* (Tr. Kings)
> *"The firefighting equipment should be available in the school and teachers trained on how to use it."* (Tr. Kabiria)
> *"There should be a first aid kit box that should be used in case there is an emergency before the child is taken to hospital."* (Tr. Vigil)
> *"The school should have at least one or two trained personnel who can handle the first aid kit."* (Tr. Augustine)

These sentiments are echoed by Wanderi [24] who argues that quality assurance and standards officers from the ministry of education should regularly to ensure safety guidelines put in place by the ministry are followed in case of a fire breakout in the school environment. It is also in line with the views of a study by Díaz-Vicario and Gairín Sallán [25], and it is also supported by the work of Glariana, Nick, as well as Solar [21].

4. CONCLUSION

Pre-primary schools in informal settlements have over the years played a critical role in providing children from disadvantaged backgrounds with education. However, due to the low income levels of inhabitants in urban slums, the schools are not able to provide safe and secure environment for children's learning. It is in view of this fact that the current study was undertaken to establish the measures put in place in these schools to enhance children's safety and security. Findings from the study revealed that while pre-primary education is a devolved function, the Nairobi City County government has not yet put adequate measures in place to ensure that in pre-primary schools in informal settlements have conducive learning environments.

The Nairobi City County Government should come up with standards to ensure that preschool compounds in informal settlements are safe and secure to enhance children's safety and security. It was apparent from this study that some preschools were not fenced and that even those that were fenced, the

fencing materials were not appropriate pausing danger to children. When schools are not fenced, children sneak out of school without teachers notice and hence endangering their lives.

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